

Know what you can't do in political campaigns

BY DON KENNEDY, Staff Writer

The American political system is officially in high gear. The Democrats have already had their convention, and the Republicans are preparing for theirs. The candidates have been chosen, and the battle lines have been drawn.

No matter where you, as a employee of the Department of Defense (military or civilian), come down on an issue, or which candidate you will lend your support to, you should be aware of rules which govern the degree to which individuals and commands can participate in the process.

As a matter of long-standing policy, Defense Department personnel acting in their official capacity may not engage in activities that associate DoD with any partisan political campaign or election, candidate, cause or issue political activity.

Installation commanders must decline requests for military personnel to appear in or support campaign or election events. All military personnel, including National Guard and reserve forces, are prohibited from wearing uniforms at political campaign or election events.

Additionally, Defense Department personnel must forward all inquiries from political campaign organizations to a public affairs officer for awareness and appropriate action.

Defense Department publications like the one you are now reading are not permitted to publish information provided by a candidate's campaign organization, partisan advertisements and discussions or cartoons, editorials and commentaries dealing with political campaigns or elections, candidates, causes or issues.

Military installation commanders cannot allow the use of installation facilities by any candidate for political campaign or election events. Those include public assemblies or town hall meetings, speeches, fund-raisers, press conferences, postelection celebrations and concession addresses. However, this policy does not permit elected officials from visiting military installations to receive briefings, tours or other official Defense Department information.

Military personnel acting in their official capacity may not engage in public commentary, including speeches and written submissions offered for publications, concerning political campaigns or elections absent prior clearance.

Military personnel are also not permitted to distribute political campaign or election literature while in uniform, while acting in their official capacity or while on a military installation.

All these rules may give you the idea that your employer is discouraging you from taking part in the political process. That's just not the case. In fact, the Defense Department encourages all active duty military and civilian personnel and their eligible family members to register and to vote. The Defense Department supports the Federal Voting Assistance Program, by publishing factual information about registration and voting laws, with special emphasis on absentee voting requirements.

For more information on voting assistance, absentee ballots or military regulations governing the degree to which DoD employees may participate in campaign or election events, contact your command legal department.